



2010 SUMMIT ON HEALTH, NUTRITION AND OBESITY: ACTIONS FOR HEALTHY LIVING

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN SCHOOLS: INCREASE MODERATE TO VIGOROUS PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION CLASSES

“I want to take what was discussed at the Summit and turn our state goals into action that will attack obesity on every level and create a healthy foundation for California’s future.” (Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, 2010 Summit On Health, Nutrition And Obesity, 2/24/10)

Action:

Assembly Bill 2705 (Hall), sponsored by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, has been introduced to require that students spend at least 50 percent of physical education class time in moderate to vigorous physical activity (MVPA) by January 1, 2013.

California Context:

California requires all students to participate in physical education (PE) classes for a specified number of minutes every 10 days, but numerous studies show that most PE classes provide little actual physical activity. The United States Department of Health and Human Services’ prevention framework “Healthy People 2010” recommends that students spend at least half of their PE class engaged in MVPA, and the California Board of Education has adopted physical education content standards and a framework for meeting those standards using physical activity. But these state and federal guidelines are not requirements, and studies show that in California schools as little as 10 to 20 percent of PE class time is spent in moderate to vigorous physical activity.

With most students in California public schools enrolled in physical education classes, active PE has significant potential to improve student health. Physically active youth have higher levels of cardio-respiratory fitness, stronger muscles, lower body fat percentages, stronger bones, and may also have reduced symptoms of anxiety and depression. Several national and state studies show a link between increased physical activity and improved academic achievement. In these studies, physical activity was linked to improved test scores and cognitive function. Studies even show an increase in student academic achievement when extra time for physical activity is taken from traditional academic instruction. Physically active students are more likely to perform well in school than their sedentary peers, and physical activity can improve classroom behavior, concentration skills, classroom attendance, and the ability of children to stay on-task.

Success Stories:

Recognizing the importance of physical activity, a number of California schools have used innovative approaches to introducing more moderate to vigorous physical activity in PE classes. Delano Union School District in Kern County, for example, implemented a standards-based PE curriculum in middle and elementary schools which focused on maximizing MVPA. First developed as a pilot program at Cecil Avenue Middle School, the District expanded the curriculum after pilot results showed an increase in student academic achievement even though class time was taken away from traditional academic instruction and applied to physical education. Similarly, Sierra Vista Junior High School in Los Angeles County developed a PE program focusing on individual physical fitness instead of traditional team sports to engage students in more MVPA. Since the program was introduced, student scores on the state physical fitness test have increased and are currently among the highest of all junior high schools in California.